



Buckinghamshire County Council

Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee

***How are we preventing child sexual
exploitation and supporting young
people in Buckinghamshire?***



The Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee

The Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee is appointed by Buckinghamshire County Council to carry out the local authority scrutiny functions for all policies and services relating to learning and the social care of children.

Membership of the Select Committee

Mrs. Margaret Aston
Mr. David Babb (Co-opted Member)
Mrs. Janet Blake
Mr. Dev Dhillon
Mr. Phil Gomm
Mr. Paul Irwin
Mrs. Valerie Letheren (Chairman)
Mrs. Wendy Mallen
Mr. Michael Moore (Co-opted Member)
Mrs. Monique Nowers (Co-opted Member)
Mr. Robin Stuchbury
Miss. Katrina Wood

Membership of the Preventing CSE Inquiry Group

Mrs. Margaret Aston
Mrs. Avril Davies (co-opted)
Mr. Dev Dhillon
Mr. Phil Gomm
Mr. Paul Irwin
Mrs. Valerie Letheren (Chairman)
Mrs. Wendy Mallen
Mr. Robin Stuchbury

Contact:

| Reece Bowman, Committee & Governance Adviser, HQ Member Services
(01296) 382548
democracy@buckscc.gov.uk

Further information on the Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee can be found at:
<https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=788>

Contents

Chairman’s Introduction	4
Executive Summary	5
Recommendations	6
Introduction	7
National Context.....	8
Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation	9
Local Context	10
Buckinghamshire Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding Children Board	10
Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Group.....	12
Transformation under the Future Shape programme.....	13
Commissioning within Children’s Services.....	13
Operation Bullfinch.....	14
Awareness Raising.....	15
Awareness Raising – The role of Schools	15
Awareness Raising – The role of Hotels	19
Awareness Raising – The role of Licensing Authorities & Taxi- Drivers.....	20
Information sharing / partnership working	22
Children Placed Out of County.....	25
Child Protection – Information Sharing (CP-IS).....	26
First Response.....	27
Early Help	28
Supporting Parents and Siblings of Victims.....	29
Conclusions.....	31
Glossary	34
Appendix A: Victims’ Contributions	35
Appendix B: Schedule of Witnesses.....	38

Chairman's Introduction



The decision to conduct an inquiry into the prevention of child sexual exploitation in Buckinghamshire was straightforward. Details that have emerged in recent months of crimes committed both locally and nationally left my colleagues and I shocked. Therefore, as the protection of children is a major part of our remit as a Select Committee, the need for us to undertake the inquiry was clear. We have taken care to ensure that we gained views from across the spectrum of professionals engaged in the fight against exploitation. Most importantly of all, we received the input of those directly affected by child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the county, including a parent of a victim and many victims themselves.

Whilst it was the correct decision to conduct the Inquiry, it has not been the easiest of processes. The evidence that we have received has been disturbing, but it has been heartening to hear of the progress that has been made in altering systems, processes and thinking in order to better address CSE. There are clear linkages with many of the issues raised in our recent inquiry into cyber-safety.¹ Our focus in this inquiry was the prevention of CSE, as to attempt to cover every aspect of the subject would have resulted in an extremely protracted process that would have taken many more months to complete. This would have been unacceptable as we wanted to make our contribution in as timely a manner possible.

I would like to extend sincere thanks to those that have taken the time to contribute to our evidence base, either by appearing in person to answer our questions, or by making written submissions where this was not possible. Even greater thanks are due to the Buckinghamshire parent and children affected by CSE that added their contribution to our inquiry. I commend their fortitude and their willingness to share their experiences as we work to constantly improve the way in which we protect children from CSE.

The production of our report has dovetailed with that of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board CSE Strategy. This means that our findings will feed into the strategy, helping to shape the overall effort to address CSE in the county. We will be presenting this report and its recommendations to the Safeguarding Children Board and the County Council's Cabinet and it will help to inform the serious case review (SCR) into previous SCRs that has just commenced. Our intention is that the significant work that we have undertaken during this inquiry results in actual change on the ground, to the benefit of children in Buckinghamshire.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Val Letheren".

Mrs. Val Letheren
Chairman, Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee

¹ The final report can be found at:
https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/documents/s55782/Report%20to%20Cabinet_STchangesfinal.pdf

Executive Summary

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a widespread issue that is not confined to one geographical area, nor is it confined to a single group of perpetrators or victims. Similarly, it occurs in various different contexts ranging from the virtual online world, through to the school yard and the night-time economy. This complicates the issue enormously and makes a coherent response to it more difficult.

This difficulty is compounded by the many factors that can converge in a child's life to make him or her more vulnerable to CSE. Unpicking the range of issues that a child may face is a big challenge for those with parental responsibility and for those with non-parental relationships with the child, such as the police and social care. It may be that underlying issues in a child's life need to be addressed before he or she even feels able to make a disclosure of CSE.

Once a disclosure is made, there is then the need to protect the child and family and the task of bringing the perpetrator/s to justice. And yet CSE is an issue that has only recently been more thoroughly understood following high profile failures by public services that were unable to fully comprehend the nature of what was taking place in their areas.

We are assured that, despite a recent such failure in Buckinghamshire, much has been done to address the knowledge gap around CSE. The majority of this work has involved the raising of awareness of the issue, combined with work to develop policies, strategies and procedures to help professionals faced with the issue. The delivery of 'spotting the signs' and other training to staff is an ongoing process. Work to improve the sharing of information continues and is a key component of efforts to safeguard children; we make several recommendations intended to improve this.

The development of the new Swan Unit represents the biggest investment of staff and resources. This dedicated service brings together into the same location the police, children's social care and staff from Barnardos RUSafe? to work on cases of CSE. At the time of writing, a representative from the health services in Buckinghamshire has yet to be appointed to the Swan Unit; a significant omission that needs to be addressed.

Work to support parents and siblings of victims is also important as it builds resilience within the family unit that can provide support, and help to protect against further exploitation. Resilience, as a means to protect against all forms of exploitation, is a theme of our report as we consider the building of it in young children to be amongst the top priorities of those working with children, particularly Buckinghamshire County Council Children's Services, the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust and the county's schools.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) should increase the amount of the BSCB Chairman's time that is purchased from the partnership's budget.

Recommendation 2: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that contract managers are monitoring the compliance of providers with safeguarding requirements, including ensuring that the Council's wider commissioned workforce undertakes child sexual exploitation training.

Recommendation 3: Buckinghamshire County Council should commission the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust to develop a toolkit for use in primary schools to help schools foster resilience in their pupils.

Recommendation 4: Thames Valley Police should roll out the Hotel Watch scheme across Buckinghamshire.

Recommendation 5: The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board should actively monitor that the thresholds document is being applied consistently and accurately by all partners.

Recommendation 6: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that all sexual health providers within Buckinghamshire attend the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference and facilitate the sharing of information between sexual health providers.

Recommendation 7: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that the names of looked after children within Buckinghamshire at highest risk of child sexual exploitation are shared with sexual health providers on a quarterly basis.

Recommendation 8: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that the effectiveness of First Response is kept under regular review, including the staffing arrangements following the introduction of the new Contact and Referral Officer post to ensure accurate and timely triage at the social care 'front door'.

Recommendation 9: Buckinghamshire County Council should commission services to provide support to the parents of victims of child sexual exploitation.

Recommendation 10: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that all County Councillors undertake training on spotting child sexual exploitation.

Introduction

1. In spring 2015 the Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee took the decision to review what is currently being done to prevent child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Buckinghamshire. This was shortly after the publication of the Serious Case Review into events in Oxford that led to the prosecution of seven men in June 2013 for offences including rape, facilitating child prostitution and trafficking.

2. The Oxford case followed similar in South Yorkshire and elsewhere. That the abuse took place in a neighbouring county with a shared police force supported the need for the Inquiry; the Select Committee therefore acted quickly and agreed terms of reference that focussed the Inquiry on the prevention of CSE in Buckinghamshire.

3. The decision to focus on prevention arose from the recognition by Members that CSE covers a broad range of activity ranging from various forms of peer-on-peer abuse through to the systematic prostitution of children using violence and extortion. It is not limited to one demographic group, nor is it limited to a single geographic area. Therefore, as a complex and multi-faceted issue, the decision was made by the Select Committee to limit the scope of the Inquiry to preventative work with those vulnerable to CSE. Limiting the Inquiry in such a way prevented the work from losing focus; it also was based on the principle that prevention is paramount. A single victim of CSE is one too many.

4. As with all Select Committee Inquiries, councillors gather evidence from a range of sources and then base recommendations to decision makers on that evidence. Our Inquiry group included cross-party political representation and our recommendations are based firmly on the evidence we heard. Through the implementation of our recommendations we hope to play a role in strengthening the preventative work underway in the county with a particular focus on the building of resilience within our children, giving them the strength to say 'no'.

5. However, Thames Valley Police have learnt from local and national cases that too much focus on the child's ability to consent has led professionals in all agencies to make poor decision about individual cases. It is worth reiterating that a child under 16 years of age cannot consent to sexual activity. Put simply even if outwardly a child has agreed to take part in sexual acts, the acts themselves remain a very serious criminal matter, which must be recorded and rigorously investigated.

6. It is worth noting that during the Inquiry, in July, six men were found guilty of committing similar offences to those perpetrated in Oxford; the majority of those convicted lived in Aylesbury, as did the victims. In September they were given lengthy custodial sentences. Nothing can compensate adequately for the offences committed, but an emphasis on prevention by all concerned with the safety of our children should hopefully go some way in making such crimes ever more difficult to commit.

National Context

7. There have been several incidences of child sexual exploitation (CSE) on a large scale that have been considered of national significance. The offence itself is not new, but the systematic and industrial scale of the exploitation in places such as Rotherham and to a lesser extent in Oxford, is something that has taken many by surprise.

8. It was found by reviews undertaken by Louise Casey, Baroness Jay and others that many of the agencies concerned, such as the police and social care, were for various reasons ill-equipped to recognise and respond to CSE. This was made more significant by the organised way in which the perpetrators identified and exploited their victims, often choosing the most vulnerable children that were least likely to see their abusers as such; perpetrators were able to threaten and cajole victims into compliance.

9. Whilst the least resilient children were targeted, they were often already engaged with support services that should have been better able to spot what was going on and intervene where they were already aware of the abuse. In cases where it was not recognised as outright abuse - for example, where there was a view that the relationships were somehow consensual – there has had to be an urgent change of culture.

10. We do not wish to repeat the points that have already been made much more comprehensively elsewhere around the failures of the various agencies concerned. However, in respect of this, we are reassured from the evidence that we have received that significant positive change has taken place and much is still ongoing. Much of this is around the training of professionals and awareness raising across the population, therefore we devote a section of our report to this type of activity.

11. Whilst the cases that have attracted the most attention have been those that involved gangs of adult males, there are also many other scenarios that can be categorised as CSE. These include situations involving peer-on-peer abuse, 'sexting' and predatory use of online gaming and social media. CSE covers a very wide range of activity which is not limited by gender, age, ethnicity or religion.

12. The diversity of the crime and those involved makes a coherent response much more difficult. We believe that the term 'Child Sexual Exploitation' itself is so broad that it is unhelpful, as it covers activities that take place online and in the playground, as well as in B&Bs and guesthouses.

13. We were made aware that much more work needs to be done on understanding CSE in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

14. It is worth noting that the inspection regime has also received criticism for failing to grasp the issue. For example, Ofsted recently received criticism from the CLG

Select Committee for failing to spot child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham. The committee made several comments around the move toward a joint inspection framework which would provide a much more comprehensive assessment of local authorities. It also mentioned the need to consider much more closely actual work with the children themselves, rather than rely upon the assessment of written policies and procedures.²

Definition of Child Sexual Exploitation

15. The nationally agreed definition of CSE is as follows:

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.

16. The definition was developed by the UK National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (NWG) and has been adopted in statutory guidance for England.

² Ofsted's response to the committee's report can be found at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/news-parliament-2015/ofsted-response-rotherham-report-publication/>

Local Context

Key facts

- **In 2014 Buckinghamshire Children’s Social Care and the Safeguarding Children Board were assessed as ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted**
- **Improvement work is now well underway**
- **A recent court case involving men from Aylesbury resulted in several prosecutions**

17. In the context of preventing child sexual exploitation (CSE), we consider the ‘local’ to be not only Buckinghamshire, but the counties and boroughs surrounding it. This is because CSE is a truly cross-border issue, with perpetrators frequently transporting victims within the county and beyond. This immediately poses a problem for agencies that are based within a single geographical location, such as the county council.

18. We initiated our Inquiry whilst the police were undertaking Operation Articulate, which investigated CSE perpetrated by men mainly resident in Aylesbury. The men were brought to trial at the Old Bailey and six were convicted of various offences including multiple rape of a child under 13 and child prostitution.

19. At sentencing, the offenders were given jail terms of between three and 19-and-a-half-years. The county council’s Managing Director for Children’s Social Care & Learning issued a statement in response to the trial.

20. Whilst Operation Articulate was underway, the Children’s Social Care & Learning Business Unit commissioned a review by an independent consultant that evaluated the multi-agency response to CSE in Buckinghamshire in preceding years.

Buckinghamshire Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding Children Board

21. It is impossible to fully consider any aspect of children’s services in Buckinghamshire without also considering the current position of the Children’s Social Care & Learning Business Unit and the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) following last year’s Ofsted inspection, which resulted in ‘inadequate’ ratings for both.

22. As a committee, we have spent much time scrutinising the improvement work that resulted from this and have noted several promising developments that should be of significance in addressing CSE, such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Swan Unit and development of the early help offer. However, criticism from Ofsted centred on fundamentals such as:

- Assessing and responding to children and young people in need of help and protection.
- Levels of unallocated work

- The severity of caseloads in some areas of the service
- The prevalence of agency, rather than permanent, members of staff

23. These are core aspects of the whole system that have to be rectified in order to effectively protect children. They are a major part of the foundation upon which the success of the whole service is based, and therefore our ongoing scrutiny of them is directly related to our work in relation to the prevention of child sexual exploitation (CSE).

24. We are of the view that improvement work is now well underway. We reported our interim findings on this work in a document that we published in June.³ Amongst our findings was endorsement of the point made by Ofsted around the recruitment and retention of social workers and the need to maintain social work caseloads at a manageable level; issues of key significance when it comes to the county council's ability to provide a social work response to CSE.

25. We are assured that CSE has been placed high up the agenda of all main statutory agencies in Buckinghamshire, under the auspices of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB), which has named the issue as one of its five priorities. The Board had previously established a CSE Sub-Group responsible for the development of a CSE Strategy and action plan. The Board has recently held 'pop-up' and 'challenge events on CSE.

26. Safeguarding Board Chairmen are often independent contractors who chair several safeguarding boards in different local authority areas. They are appointed by upper tier council (county and unitary) Chief Executives and many are paid on an hourly or daily rate.

27. We believe that the new chairman and support team of the BSCB are contributing fresh ideas and renewed energy. However, we have doubts as to whether enough of the new chairman's time has been purchased to enable the BSCB to be brought up to the requisite standard, following last year's 'inadequate' rating of it by Ofsted. We were made aware of the fact that she is employed for only 30 days per year in Buckinghamshire, which we consider to be insufficient.

28. Whilst these are positive developments, we are aware that the CSE Strategy has been in development since last year; the CSE Sub-Group may need more senior representation on it; and there is work to be done (as on many other issues) on building the link between the strategic-level BSCB work, and the work done 'on the ground' by practitioners.

Recommendation 1: The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) should increase the amount of the BSCB Chairman's time that is purchased from the partnership's budget.

³ See: <https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/documents/s57735/Improvement%20reportv5.pdf>

Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Group

29. The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board has a child sexual exploitation (CSE) sub-group that takes the lead on the topic. The group has recently changed its chairman and holds responsibility for the production of the CSE Strategy, which at the time of writing is still in development. The sub-group meets on a monthly basis and consists of representatives from several of the various agencies that comprise the BSCB. Key achievements of the sub-committee include:

- The development of a Practice Guide for CSE
- The development and pilot of the *aide memoire* for professionals on CSE
- Supporting the rollout of 'Chelsea's Choice', which has been delivered across the county, with 33 secondary schools participating in the production, mainly covering year 8 and 9 pupils
- Securing funding for 'Chelsea's Choice' to be rolled out for a second time (Sept-Oct 2015)
- Gaining agreement on the operating protocol for the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference (SERAC)
- Running the RU Wise2it? campaign, with the development, with the involvement of children, of posters, leaflets and a social media campaign
- The development of a leaflet for parents
- The piloting of a parents' evening which involved the attendance of approximately 30 parents, who also provided feedback on how the event could be improved. Seven events have now been held across the county
- The launch of a single point of access for CSE advice, created through RUWise2it?, which lands on the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) webpage. This includes specific information for children and young people, parents, carers and professionals, respectively
- Implementation of new multi-agency awareness raising training after pilots in the previous year. This now has a waiting list and agreement has been given to double the number of sessions per annum from three to six
- Significant involvement in the National CSE Awareness Raising Day on 18th March, involving a large amount of media coverage. Public Health has worked closely with the sexual health services to ensure they have access to specialist information, training and the CSE screening tool. In addition Public Health has developed a Facebook campaign entitled 'What's your pulling playlist?'

30. We believe that the work underway represents a strong start and much appears to have been achieved. We hope to see that the current momentum is maintained for long enough to ensure that the improvements are placed onto a sustainable footing.

Transformation under the Future Shape programme

31. The Children's Social Care & Learning Business Unit is soon to undergo its transformation under the County Council's Future Shape programme. Whilst the case for the Future Shape programme has been made elsewhere, we would expect that the implementation of the programme in the Children's Social Care & Learning Business Unit should not be allowed to distract attention from the critical and time consuming work involved in getting children's services back to an acceptable standard. We will be seeking assurance on this from the Director of Children's Services, the Cabinet Members and the Chief Executive.

32. If fully realised, the savings that can arise from the implementation of the Future Shape programme should go some way in mitigating the impact of ever increasing demand and reducing resources. In that respect, we welcome the long term ambition of the programme and look forward to monitoring its progress. We note that the consultation on the implementation of the programme in children's and adult services begins at the start of October and we will be commenting on this at our November meeting.

Commissioning within Children's Services

33. The commissioning of services for children is done under the auspices of the Buckinghamshire Children's Joint Commissioning Strategy 2011-2014. Joint commissioning is undertaken with the Clinical Commissioning Groups, the Public Health Service within the County Council, and various other bodies. Commissioned services of particular note in terms of preventing Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) include client transport, RUSafe?, school nurses and sexual health providers.

34. We note that the Joint Commissioning Strategy is now expired and is due a refresh. Our view is that contract managers should be working diligently to ensure that providers of commissioned services are meeting their safeguarding duties. Furthermore, we believe that this should also include ensuring that the staff members of commissioned service providers undertake training of relevance to spotting CSE.

Recommendation 2: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that contract managers are monitoring the compliance of providers with safeguarding requirements, including ensuring that the Council's wider commissioned workforce undertakes child sexual exploitation training.

Operation Bullfinch

35. Local incidences of child sexual exploitation (CSE) have included those uncovered during Operation Bullfinch in Oxford. The CSE that took place in Oxford was a distinctive variety, which was highly organised and widespread, involving abuse of children that was at the highest level of severity.

36. We have learnt of the work that has been undertaken in Oxfordshire since Bullfinch through consideration of the Serious Case Review ⁴that was published and through the more recently released 'stocktake' document⁵ produced by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, which we have considered as a part of our evidence base. We were interested to compare learning from Oxfordshire to the situation in Buckinghamshire; aspects of importance within the document include:

- Children's Social Care is, and should be seen as, the lead agency for safeguarding
- Work remains to be done on the regulation of taxi drivers – the report states that '[district councils] need to improve how they share information about drivers, delegate enforcement powers and require taxi drivers to complete safeguarding training as part of any knowledge test'
- Work needs to be done on the commissioning of services to provide help and therapy for children as they transition into adulthood
- The Kingfisher Unit is seen as a very positive development; it also provides consultancy and support to other services. The new Swan Unit in Buckinghamshire is based on Kingfisher
- There is now a 'Need to Know' policy which gives practitioners guidance on when cases need to be escalated to senior managers
- Social workers, police officers and civilian staff within the police force are now a lot more persistent and won't be 'fobbed off' as easily by potential victims – they work with them until they feel confident enough to disclose
- School nurses now use a consent checklist for sexual relationships – all schools have a nurse and some are available all year round, not just in term time
- There is brief mention of the 'Say something if you see something' training that is provided to hotels, guest houses, door staff, parks and street scene staff, etc. Only 12 out of 800 Oxford City licensed drivers took up the offer of training in the last 12 months and there is no safeguarding training offered by the other Oxford districts (page 30)

37. The stocktake document relates to Oxfordshire but it contains subject matter of equal relevance to Buckinghamshire or any other local authority area. Therefore, we would expect to see evidence of learning from Oxfordshire being applied in Buckinghamshire. One good example of this is the development of the Swan Unit, which is based upon the now well established Kingfisher Unit in Oxford.

⁴ See: <http://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Serious-Case-Review-into-Child-Sexual-Exploitation-in-Oxfordshire-FINAL-Updated-14.3.15.pdf>

⁵ See: <http://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Stocktake-report1.pdf>

38. The Swan Unit was in its very early days whilst we conducted our Inquiry; therefore it is difficult for us to draw any conclusions about it as yet. However, we will be considering the Unit and its development at a later date as a part of our regular Select Committee work programme.

Awareness Raising

Key findings

- **Significant work has taken place in secondary schools to raise awareness of sexual exploitation**
- **Age-appropriate work in primary schools should now be a priority**
- **The development of resilience in younger children is particularly important to protect them against all forms of exploitation**

Awareness Raising – The role of Schools

39. We received the evidence of three committed head teachers that were willing to share their experience of working with children in a school setting. Also at the session we heard from a Thames Valley Police School Liaison Officer who was able to give us an alternative perspective on work in schools.

40. All described how different the current environment is in which children grow up in today. The most significant difference is the internet, which has altered to a great extent the way in which children learn, play and communicate with others. Whilst much of the change has been very beneficial, aspects of it have been much less so: the interconnectivity that the internet has introduced facilitates the exploitation of vulnerable people.

41. The online world is largely unregulated, under-policed and anonymous. The use of fake online profiles can be used to mislead children. Certain websites and smartphone applications enable the sharing of photographs and information which can later be used to exploit children using them in an unsafe way. What compounds the issue is that anything placed online is effectively there 'forever', even if the original material posted online is then deleted.

42. This is not just limited to social media; online gaming and other platforms can be used to facilitate the exploitation of children. We heard about the proliferation of websites that are aimed at children with new sites emerging frequently, making it difficult if not impossible for parents, carers and teachers to keep track of what children are doing online. It is important that schools operate policies which bar students from bringing mobile devices onto the school premises.

43. Awareness raising activities such as 'Chelsea's Choice' and campaigns such as RUSafe? give children some level of understanding of the risks facing them. However, children that are frequently absent from school may miss productions of

'Chelsea's Choice' and lessons on personal, social and health education (PSHE) that address issues of relevance to child sexual exploitation (CSE). Unfortunately, the same children that are frequently absent from school are often those that are at highest risk of CSE – these are the children that need to be quickly identified and provided with persistent offers of information, advice and guidance from parents and professionals.

44. School nurses play a key role in this, as they are able to build relationships with children that teachers are often unable to. Similarly, police school liaison officers are in a position to provide immediate protection, help and support to those children that are in need of it. We were informed that every school has an assigned police officer from within the local neighbourhood team, tasked with maintaining a relationship with that school. However, not every school benefits from a dedicated school liaison officer.

45. One of the main themes that emerged from the session was the importance of building resilience in children from an early age. Helping secondary school age children to become aware of risk is vitally important, but the work should start much earlier in primary school, with the building of resilience within children.

46. Using age-appropriate means to build confidence and self-esteem in children is potentially a lot more effective way of preventing child sexual exploitation (CSE), as the child him/herself is able to understand the boundaries of what is acceptable, and then has the self-confidence to be able to inform an adult when these boundaries are not respected.⁶

47. We would endorse further research into the way in which younger children of primary school age can be assisted in developing the resilience they need to protect against CSE and other forms of exploitation such as radicalisation. The current guidance on Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) does not include specific reference to building a child's defences against CSE; this is a significant gap.

Recommendation 3: Buckinghamshire County Council should commission the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust to develop a toolkit for use in primary schools to help schools foster resilience in their pupils.

48. In Buckinghamshire the Safeguarding Board (BSCB) has published Practice Guidance on CSE (dated June 2014)⁷ and has overseen the RUWise2it? campaign.⁸ This has been used to raise awareness of CSE directly amongst children using

⁶ For example, the NSPCC has developed the 'underwear rule' to help adults discuss boundaries with younger children; see: <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/underwear-rule/>

⁷ BSCB Practice Guidance on Child Sexual Exploitation, http://www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CSE/CSE_Practice_Guidance_2014.pdf

⁸ See: <http://www.bucks-lscb.org.uk/child-sexual-exploitation-launch/>

various channels of communication. Materials have been supplied to all schools in the county, but we were concerned to hear that certain of the head teachers that we spoke to had no knowledge of receiving it.

49. 'Chelsea's Choice' is a drama production that portrays a series of events that culminates in the sexual exploitation of a child. The production toured Oxfordshire schools in the years immediately following Operation Bullfinch, and more recently it has featured in Buckinghamshire Schools. The target audience is older children of secondary school age.

50. It is difficult to assess exactly the effectiveness of plays such as 'Chelsea's Choice', but the number of children coming forward to disclose abuse following a performance is a useful indicator. Data on the number of such disclosures would be useful when making a case for resources to commission further awareness raising activity in schools.

51. Children's Services needs to be in a position to manage any increase in demand arising from awareness raising activities; demand that would initially fall on the first points of contact for child sexual exploitation (CSE)-related contacts: First Response and the police.

52. The people raising these contacts might include parents, children themselves, teachers, school nurses, police school liaison, GPs, and so on. Further information on who is making these contacts, and in what frequency, would allow a picture of demand to be developed. CSE training could then be targeted at those making the greatest number of reports of alleged CSE.

53. Better intelligence could also be used in a variety of other ways, including improving:

- The experience of the child making the disclosure;
- The level of training provided by the local authority to those to whom the child has confided;
- The response and support given by First Response, the police and RUSafe? to those to whom the child has confided

54. Such work on the referral pathway would result in a speedier and more efficient service to the vulnerable child and those working directly with him/her.

Education Safeguarding Advisory Service (ESAS)

55. ESAS is a team of specialists supporting safeguarding in schools. The team has a key role to play in addressing CSE and to that end it is an active member of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board CSE sub group. It also contributes to the co-ordination of services across the county in supporting schools, children, their families and communities in raising awareness of the complexity of CSE and the resources available locally and nationally to address it.

56. Education Safeguarding Advisory Service (ESAS) has worked with secondary schools across Bucks to support the roll out of 'Chelsea's Choice' to Year Groups 8 and 9. This will again be available to schools over the Autumn Term and is now in its second year of delivery

57. ESAS has supported the work of the child sexual exploitation (CSE) sub group to develop resources to raise awareness of the issue. It also ensures that these resources, including posters and fliers, are available within schools. Some schools have used these resources in the safeguarding areas of their website to facilitate access by students and their families.

58. Information available to schools on the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) website is also referenced in training and via the Schools Bulletin, which is distributed to all maintained schools and academies in the county. Independent schools are kept informed via the Independent Schools Forum

59. As part of the Section 11 / 175 Audit process a Toolkit of resources has been developed for schools. There is a file within this containing resources to support schools identify the signs and indicators of CSE, deal with emerging disclosures and identifying vulnerability

60. The ESAS team contributes to the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment (SERAC) and Multi-Agency Risk Meeting (MARM) processes, attending the meetings, sharing and collating information with and from education providers, on children identified as vulnerable. Information offered by the police and other agencies is shared with the designated safeguarding lead at the child's school.

61. Since the launch of ESAS last year the team has also introduced termly Forums for Dedicated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) in each of the districts to enable safeguarding updates to be given on the local and national issues. CSE has been a feature in a number of these sessions. Barnardos reps are invited to the Autumn Forums to ensure DSL remain in touch with this live issue in Bucks.

62. In terms of training provided, the ESAS team has:

- Participated in the design and delivery of the multi-agency CSE training package developed by the BSCB
- Reviewed and redesigned the learning pathway for DSL within schools. A new DSL training package was developed and CSE is included within this to support those charged with raising awareness within their schools with the skills to identify vulnerability, signs and indicators. Delivery of this topic is done in partnership with the Schools link officer from RUSafe?
- CSE is also covered with Barnardo's support, in the DSL Refresher training

- CSE is covered in both the primary and secondary whole school training package, which form part of the statutory training required of staff (Keeping Children Safe in Education 2015 & the Education Act 2002)
- ESAS has worked with Barnardo's to develop a standalone training package which can be delivered to the whole school staff team.
- Via the schools bulletin ESAS has also promoted the support the NSPCC is offering to children at Primary level to support them to think about who they can tell their worries to. This offer has been taken up by a number of schools and the work is currently drawing Barnardos and the NSPCC lead together to develop a local resource for children in Bucks (targeted at year groups 5 & 6) to support them to reflect on and understand what constitutes a "healthy" relationship.

Awareness Raising – The role of Hotels

63. More targeted awareness-raising is also taking place within Buckinghamshire. For example, Hotel Watch is a Thames Valley Police initiative that is based on the same principles as Neighbourhood Watch, Farm Watch, Pub Watch, and others. Hotel Watch includes within its scope the prevention of child sexual exploitation (CSE); although, it also includes separate issues such as ensuring that the police are informed about large social events taking place at the hotel, the security of hotel car parks, and so on.

64. Hotel Watch in High Wycombe held its first meeting in October 2015 and it was hoped that the major hoteliers in the area would be represented, along with representatives from several other smaller scale establishments. The CSE aspect of the meeting would be concerned with increasing awareness amongst staff of the signs of potential CSE and how to raise any concerns with the appropriate agencies (the police, First Response and RUSafe?).⁹

65. Hotel Watch is in its early days and is a welcome development, especially due to the way in which perpetrators of CSE have abused hotels and guesthouses in the course of their crimes. Any further help that statutory agencies can provide the sector should be encouraged as a means to making the hospitality industry a key partner in addressing CSE. 'Say something if you see something' training is now a significant component of this in Oxfordshire, provided to hotels, guest houses, door staff, parks and street scene staff, etc.¹⁰

66. We were pleased to hear about developments that were taking place which will allow hotels to share information quickly and easily in the event of any concerns. Whilst Hotel Watch is a welcome development in High Wycombe, we believe that the

⁹ The police on 101 or in an emergency on 999; or First Response on 08454 600001

¹⁰ See: <http://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Stocktake-report1.pdf>, p. 30

initiative should be replicated across Buckinghamshire. The benefits of this are self-explanatory and the level of investment required by Thames Valley Police should be relatively low.

Recommendation 4: Thames Valley Police should roll out the Hotel Watch scheme across Buckinghamshire

Awareness Raising – The role of Licensing Authorities & Taxi- Drivers

67. We were grateful to receive evidence from the District Council licensing managers, who play a critical role in relation to regulating hackney carriages and private hire vehicles. They also have duties in relation to the ‘night-time economy’, which includes takeaways, public houses and night clubs. Unfortunately we were unable to cover in great depth the issues around safeguarding in the night-time economy, but we are of the understanding that this is an area of significant risk that requires much further work.

68. Hackney carriages are in far fewer numbers in all of the Buckinghamshire districts, and this in turn means that the drivers are much easier to stay in contact with. We were informed that in certain areas they are more organised as a trade group, resulting in some extent to an element of self-regulation and greater contact with the local authorities.

69. This is in contrast to the situation with private hire vehicles, of which there are many in operation in all of the Buckinghamshire Districts. Because there are many times the numbers of private hire vehicles, it makes it much more difficult to address that section of the trade as a group. We were informed that the operators themselves vary in scale from sole traders through to larger private hire enterprises with many affiliated drivers.

70. The implication of this is that when training on issues such as safeguarding is offered to the drivers it is much easier to involve the hackney carriage operators as communication with them is easier, mainly due to the fact that they are a much smaller group of self-employed drivers. In contrast, attempting to engage the much larger patchwork of private hire companies in training is a harder task.

71. The main sanction against drivers arises from the requirement for license holders to be ‘fit and proper’. Therefore, in the first instance drivers are invited to training, and then if there isn’t a good response there is further encouragement. If this does not work then the driver can be considered not ‘fit and proper’ and sanctions can be applied to the license, for example suspension and ultimately revocation.

72. This is not a straightforward process and it is infrequently applied; also, we were informed that the term ‘fit and proper’ is not defined in law. The licensing committees of the respective district councils are usually involved in the process, and we were informed that there were plans for further training for licensing committees in certain of the districts.

73. In the latter half of 2014 the district council licensing managers had come together to form a peer group, also involving Thames Valley Police, in recognition that it would be useful to share more information. A shift of emphasis has taken place which has resulted in a greater focus on people using the trade, as opposed to the trade itself; for example, where applicants have a criminal record, this is now receiving greater weighting than it had in the past, policies are being applied more strictly, training will be made obligatory for new drivers and links are being developed with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and Amey.¹¹

74. We see these as welcome developments, but would hope to see this joined up with the overarching work of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board, with reference to the developing CSE Strategy for Buckinghamshire.

75. The licensing managers were of the view that the level of English spoken by the drivers was of great importance to avoid misunderstandings with passengers that could compromise either the driver or the passenger.

¹¹ Provider of client transport in Buckinghamshire

Information sharing / partnership working

Key findings

- **Ofsted inspections should include consultation with school nurses and police school liaison officers where present**
- **The roll-out of CP-IS in Buckinghamshire should be fully supported and expedited by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**
- **Sexual health providers have a key role to play in sharing information, between themselves and with other agencies**

76. The sharing of information is a common theme across many issues, including the prevention of child sexual exploitation (CSE). It plays a role at every stage in the process of the journey of the child through the system, and at every stage it is usually in need of improvement. We heard that often there is reluctance to share information because of issues around data protection and the legality of doing so.

77. However, a recently issued (March 2015) joint statement from Secretaries of State outlines that '... a teenager at risk of child sexual exploitation is a child at risk of significant harm. Nothing should stand in the way of sharing information in relation to child sexual abuse, even where there are issues with consent'.¹²

78. The sharing of information plays a key role in several respects, including:

- When making contact with First Response or the police to share initial information
- When professionals undertake statutory meetings to share information on a vulnerable child
- When specialist meetings take place, such as Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference (SERAC)
- On a day-to-day basis between professionals in environments such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Swan Unit
- When developing 'problem profiles' or other forms of intelligence

79. All information sharing in Buckinghamshire is undertaken within the legislative framework and within the confines of a number of written agreements between agencies specific to Buckinghamshire. Beneath these agreements sit various policies and procedures that are intended to offer guidance to practitioners when making decisions as to when to share information in various different circumstances.

80. Those sharing information in cases of CSE include the police, social care, health services, schools and RUSafe? Based on what we heard information sharing links

¹² See:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408843/info_sharing_letter5.pdf, p. 5

appear to be strongest between children's social care and the police. These two agencies have the greatest representation in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and comprise the majority of staff in the new Swan Unit. There has been and continues to be cooperation in the investigation of many different cases of child sexual exploitation (CSE). The involvement of health services remains an issue.

81. The focus of this Inquiry is on the prevention of CSE, and therefore the focus is on information sharing before an offence is perpetrated. In this respect, the Barnardos RUSafe? service is critical. We were informed by the Service Manager that there is a 12 week target for the provision of the service and that target is always met. However, we were concerned to hear that children are left waiting for an average of between 5 and 7 weeks for a service from RUSafe?, although efforts were made to ensure that the child is protected whilst waiting. Risk assessment is undertaken on each individual case; where the risk identified is high, the child receives a quicker service.

82. We would expect that risk assessment consistently takes place with reference to the BSCB threshold document. Our view is that the commissioners of the RUSafe? service and the BSCB should together take a lead on ensuring that this is the case, particularly when waiting times for a service are potentially so long; in these circumstances the assessment of risk should be accurate, consistent and in accordance with the BSCB threshold document. This should be clearly specified by the commissioners of RUSafe? and application of the threshold document should be regularly monitored in conjunction with the BSCB.

Recommendation 5: The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board should actively monitor that the threshold policy is being applied consistently and accurately by all partners.

83. Additional partners with a key role to play in preventing CSE are sexual health providers, which in Buckinghamshire include pharmacists, Terence Higgins Trust, Brook and Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust. We heard directly from representatives of these providers and were assured that awareness of CSE was high and measures had been taken in response to it, most significantly at a national level by Brook, which recently introduced its CSE screening tool.¹³

84. Local practice is informed by an awareness of the risk of CSE and there appeared to be a common understanding of when and how to refer. We would refer back to the earlier comment about the use of the threshold document as a guide for practitioners which provides a common understanding across the county in terms of risk. We questioned the representatives of the sexual health providers and their commissioners in the Public Health Team on the level of information sharing that took place.

¹³ See: <http://www.brook.org.uk/our-work/category/sexual-behaviours-traffic-light-tool>

85. We were informed that Terence Higgins Trust operates a 'red flagging' system which makes practitioners aware of when they are dealing with repeat referrals to their services in the county. This addresses the risk of attempting to mask sexual activity by receiving sexual health services from different Terence Higgins locations, as they all share information.

86. However, when we questioned information sharing between providers, we were informed that there was currently in operation no way of sharing information on those children presenting frequently but at a different provider on each occasion.¹⁴ This is a clear risk as it fails to provide a thorough view of the risky sexual activity of a potentially vulnerable child.

87. Pharmacies, which can provide certain sexual health services, are an added dimension to this and a child could present at numerous different pharmacies (e.g. for emergency contraception), then a combination of more specialised sexual services, without that treatment history being made fully apparent to a practitioner. It would only be fully apparent if the child was willing and able to describe the treatment history to the practitioner, who could then raise his or her concerns.

88. However, it is highly improbable that a child under duress would be willing to do so. Even a child under no duress could not be expected to recount several different visits to clinics, pharmacies, etc. Therefore all efforts should be made to share information more effectively within the sexual health provider community within Buckinghamshire. If sexual health providers do so, then information on the highest risk children that use the services will be shared within a confidential environment. Therefore, we make the following recommendation:

Recommendation 6: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that all sexual health providers within Buckinghamshire attend the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference and facilitate the sharing of information between sexual health providers.

89. The SERAC (Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference) is a multi-agency forum for information sharing on the highest risk children. It is hosted by Children's Social Care and is co-chaired with Thames Valley Police. The SERAC meetings result in a jointly developed risk management plan that provides support to those that are on the SERAC agenda; they are only removed from the SERAC agenda once levels of risk are reduced.

90. We questioned the sexual health providers on the level of service given to children in the care of the local authority, as children especially vulnerable to exploitation. We were informed that the child's social worker would always be

¹⁴ For example, receiving service from Brook in August, then Terence Higgins Trust in November

involved in the discussion, but this is assuming that the child discloses that he or she is in care. We therefore recommend that:

Recommendation 7: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that the names of looked after children within Buckinghamshire at highest risk of child sexual exploitation are shared with sexual health providers on a quarterly basis.

Children Placed Out of County

91. Often children looked after by the county council are placed outside of Buckinghamshire in different local authority areas. This can be for various reasons to do with the needs of the child. If these needs cannot be met by provision within Buckinghamshire, or to keep the child within the county would be unsafe, then social care will place the child outside of the county.

92. We have previously reported¹⁵ on the situation in Buckinghamshire in respect of looked after child placements. Headline approximate figures on the number of children looked after 'in house' by Buckinghamshire County Council and neighbouring authorities include:

- Buckinghamshire <50%
- Oxfordshire 80%+
- Hertfordshire 90%+
- Milton Keynes 75% +

93. Placing so many children out of county can have implications both in terms of cost and in terms of the ability of Buckinghamshire County Council to monitor and ultimately safeguard the child placed out of county, at 'arms-length' from social care. Whilst the child's social worker remains in frequent contact, we believe that it is self-apparent that in the majority of cases it would be easier for Buckinghamshire social care to remain in contact with a child placed within Buckinghamshire itself, or at least within close proximity to the county.

94. In many cases children at risk of sexual exploitation may be among those that benefit from a placement out of county, where this removes them from direct association with abusers and those facilitating abuse. Although, we have heard from several witnesses about the use of social media and the way in which it can be used to very easily trace the whereabouts of those targeted for abuse.

¹⁵ *Improving Children's Social*

Care Inquiry; see:

<https://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/documents/s57735/Improvement%20reportv5.pdf>

95. There are two issues for Buckinghamshire County Council: firstly, whether Buckinghamshire children placed elsewhere are adequately protected. Secondly, whether children placed within Buckinghamshire from outside the area are adequately protected. Looked after children are particularly vulnerable and require proper oversight by the local authority wherever they reside, especially when they are at risk of being tracked down by exploitative and often violent people from their past.

96. Where a child is placed out of county we believe that there should be a way in which social care in the local authority area hosting the child is incentivised to provide support to the child concerned. This would provide the child with a social care contact on their doorstep and could be achieved in various ways, including a reciprocal agreement¹⁶ or a re—charge model, in which Buckinghamshire social care would be invoiced for social worker time from the host authority area – this might work out cheaper than paying Buckinghamshire social workers’ travel to more distant parts of the country and overnight expenses.

97. We are aware that there would be complexities involved in this, including a much greater exchange of information about looked after children between authorities placing the child and those hosting the child, but believe that it is important to consider innovative ways to protect children whatever issues they are facing, wherever they are placed in the country.

Child Protection – Information Sharing (CP-IS)

98. Achieving consistent, cross-boundary information sharing is a significant challenge. Ad-hoc arrangements between individuals can fall prey to changing circumstances, such as one of the individuals moving on. In this case the ad-hoc arrangements may break down. The police are able to access national databases such as the Police National Computer (PNC) which enable cross-boundary working. Similarly, the NHS can track individuals across boundaries using individuals’ NHS numbers. Social care does not have access to such national systems.

99. The Child Protection – Information Sharing (CP-IS)¹⁷ is an attempt to address this by sharing local authority child protection information with local unscheduled care settings. The reasoning behind this is given in the frequently asked questions:

Serious case reviews have demonstrated that children living in abusive and neglectful home environments are more likely to be mobile and move across different local authority boundaries, yet most child protection information is only held in the area where the child lives, and is not shared nationally. This means that healthcare practitioners often lack access to the information that could help

¹⁶ Where Bucks social care provides the equivalent service to children it is hosting from that local authority area

¹⁷ See: <http://systems.hscic.gov.uk/cpis/needed>

them to form a clear assessment of a child's possible risks. This has been a long-standing problem for the NHS, but one that CP-IS aims to address.

Although solutions have been, and are being, developed to share such child protection information between health and social care at a local level, these solutions (along with current manual systems) do not capture the movement of children across local authority boundaries.

100. The rollout of CP-IS is staggered across the country and if successfully implemented, should support the safeguarding of our most vulnerable children. We are of the view that it would go some way to addressing some of the issues raised in Serious Case Reviews that might have been avoided had healthcare practitioners more comprehensive information about the child under treatment.

First Response

101. The main points of contact for any professional with concern about a child are the police and First Response. Where there is a need for a non-emergency response, the initial contact point should be First Response, which is the Buckinghamshire Children's Social Care 'front door'. This then involves:

- Triage of the information provided by the person in the First Response Team responding to the telephone call or referral form
- A decision, which could be to respond with no further action, refer to early help services, send to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding (MASH) for further information gathering / sharing, or refer directly to a Child in Need Team for a social care response
- Inform the person who made the contact of the decision made
- The agreed next steps take place (e.g. statutory meetings about the child take place; referral to other services made, etc.)
- Child receives the appropriate service

102. The end-to-end time from the contact being made with First Response through to child receiving the appropriate service should clearly be as short as possible. If there is an emergency response required, or the child subject to the contact with First Response is otherwise at very high risk, then a very speedy social care response is required. Making the judgement as to whether such a response is required is the task of a well-trained and knowledgeable professional with the necessary level of experience; they also need the correct information about the referral immediately in order to make the correct decision first time.

103. We have previously been informed that the Contact and Referral Officer post had been created to perform this role. These practitioners are not social work qualified but should be at the right level of seniority and experience to be the first point of contact at the 'front door' of children's services. Getting it right at the first point of contact has a critically important impact on outcomes for children. Staff at

the appropriate levels of seniority and experience and seniority will play a vital role in:

- Signposting to appropriate services
- Feeding back to those making the initial contact
- Eliciting the correct information to enable social work qualified staff to make timely decisions.

104. In coming months, we will be seeking assurance around the implementation of the Contact and Referral Officer post, given its fundamentally important role in the whole system of children's services in Buckinghamshire.

Recommendation 8: Buckinghamshire County Council should ensure that the effectiveness of First Response is kept under regular review, including the staffing arrangements following the introduction of the new Contact and Referral Officer post to ensure accurate and timely triage at the social care 'front door'.

Early Help

105. Where a decision is made to refer to early help services (Family Resilience, Families First, children's centres, etc.), the new Early Help Panel will become involved. This is a development which we have been informed about in our public meetings of the Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee. The Panel is an initiative arising from the children's services improvement programme¹⁸ and is in its infancy.

106. Three were initially planned for the county and independent chairs from the county council and partner agencies were to be used. That there is now only a single panel planned for the county is a concern, especially as it was initially thought that three would be required. When three were planned issues were raised with the capacity of those chairing the Panels to meet the work schedule of them. With now only a single panel planned, this is worsened.

107. We will be monitoring the development of the Early Help Panel as it may have the potential to help coordinate information sharing and preventative work which, if effective, will control the risk of CSE to some extent. We will be seeking further information on the way in which referrals are made to the Panels and the way in which they fit into the broader system of children's services.

¹⁸ The programme of work instigated following last year's Ofsted 'Inadequate' rating of children's social care in Buckinghamshire and the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board

Supporting Parents and Siblings of Victims

Key findings

- Child sexual exploitation has a serious impact on entire families
- Parents and siblings can be subjected to threats, intimidation and further exploitation
- Not enough support is available to the parents and siblings of children affected by sexual exploitation

108. Our principal source of evidence around the provision for parents and siblings of victims was the very useful input of Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE), a national charity working to support the parents of those affected by child sexual exploitation (CSE). Coupled with this, we were fortunate enough to receive a written contribution from a Buckinghamshire parent, the child of whom had been a victim of CSE.

109. Our Inquiry has deliberately focussed solely on the prevention of CSE. Our view is that work with parents and the siblings of those affected by CSE is a critical aspect of the preventative work that should be underway. This is due to the often heightened risk to family group members when a child has been subjected to CSE. We were informed that this risk can consist of threats of violence towards parents and attempts to exploit sisters and brothers of those already subject to abuse.

110. Despite this, we heard from the PACE representative that nationally there are large gaps in provision for parents and immediate family members. Not only does this potentially place other children in the family at risk, but it also leaves parents that have been left depressed and heartbroken almost completely alone in dealing with the trauma they and their families are facing.

111. In a written report to us, the PACE representative states:

The majority of children affected by child sexual exploitation (CSE) are living at home when the exploitation starts. Sexually exploited children suffer physical, psychological, behavioural and attitudinal changes; these all present challenges to their parents and threaten the stability of a family environment.

An affected child may direct emotional, verbal and even physical aggression towards parents, siblings and this often extreme behaviour can be difficult for parents and carers to manage, resulting in what can be described as a 'chaotic household'. The child's estrangement from the family achieved by the perpetrators as a result of calculated grooming can also result in strained relationships and broken families.

The disempowerment of parents as protectors of their child as a result of the perpetrator's grooming, coercion and intimidation can then be unwittingly increased by statutory agencies and professionals, who assume that the parent or family is unwilling, or incapable, of protecting their child from exploitation.

112. The letter we received from the Buckinghamshire parent of a child sexual exploitation (CSE) victim describes the strong support provided by RUSafe? to the victim concerned, and the offer of a counsellor for the parent from RUSafe?, but it is stated that this is not enough. The letter goes on to state that the whole family needed support that was not there:

I needed someone who understood what I felt that, could talk to me during out of office hours. I needed above all to meet other parents who had experienced the same thing and to know I was not alone. I needed to meet someone who could empathise about how long the journey to court was, who was there for me and would not judge what had happened or how I felt about it. I did not want an online forum or a phone call – I wanted face to face contact with people in my situation ... It was not enough that the victim was supported – my whole family needed support and it wasn't there.

Recommendation 9: Buckinghamshire County Council should commission services to provide support to the parents of victims of child sexual exploitation.

Conclusions

113. Our Inquiry has been wide-ranging in terms of the evidence that we have gathered. It is clear from all concerned that child sexual exploitation (CSE) is very much at the forefront of agencies' agendas; for example, it is listed as one of the main priorities of both Thames Valley Police and the Police & Crime Commissioner; similarly, Buckinghamshire County Council has made it a strategic priority of children's services and the BSCB has named it as one of its priority areas.

114. The high level of attention locally in Buckinghamshire replicates the attention given to the issue at the national level; this is welcomed by us and all that we have spoken to on the subject. The level of attention locally has clearly manifested in action 'on the ground', most notably in the awareness raising activities taking place, for example in schools, and in the development and refinement of policies and procedures in the light of what is now understood about CSE.

115. In respect of the understanding of CSE, it is very encouraging that there appears to be a consensus emerging on what is meant by the term 'Child Sexual Exploitation'. This is a major step forward in helping to develop a common understanding of the issue both in terms of how it can be spotted and in terms of measuring its prevalence.

116. The national definition of CSE has been a useful development in that respect, as it has given a common description to a widespread, complex and multifaceted issue. However, whilst a common definition is helpful, we note that there is still some issue around the use of different criteria by agencies for identifying actual or potential victims of CSE. Clearly this is an area that requires further work and we will be monitoring this as a Select Committee at a later date.

117. We understand that CSE often occurs in conjunction with other factors that place a child at risk; these include domestic abuse, involvement in gangs, substance misuse and running away. As the understanding of CSE grows nationally and within Buckinghamshire, we look forward to seeing a more sophisticated analysis of the risk factors interrelate, so interventions can be made by the appropriate agency/agencies in a timelier manner.

118. The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board *Aide Memoire* is a welcome development and could provide a useful source of intelligence, if the *Aide Memoire* forms are collected from those making contact with the police / social care and the data within them are analysed periodically. Over time, this could provide a useful insight into the interplay of CSE risk factors within the county.

119. After the evidence-gathering session we held with District Council Licensing Managers, became aware of a potential gap in terms of work underway to target the 'night-time economy', which consists of takeaways, nightclubs, bars and so on. This is obviously significant due to the time spent participating in the night-time economy

by many older children. The use of drugs and alcohol by both children and adults is likely to be more prevalent in the night-time economy, which adds to the level of risk.

120. We have since been informed that a Barnardos worker has gone on to make contact with licensing teams across the county as well as working alongside police under the Hotel Watch scheme; also, a pledge around CSE has been developed for businesses within the night-time economy. We consider these to be very positive developments.

121. Work within the night-time economy is complicated by the flow of people through, for example takeaways, which makes the task of ensuring the safety of children difficult as it is impossible to regulate everybody frequenting or working on the premises. There is therefore likely to be a need to target 'hotspots' in the night-time economy where older children are known to congregate.

122. Hot spot targeting is an activity undertaken by neighbourhood policing teams and the identification of child sexual exploitation (CSE) should already form a key component of this; local authority staff (such as youth workers) should contribute to this wherever possible, with overall coordination likely to come from the local Community Safety Partnerships.

123. Potentially useful developments such as Hotel Watch in High Wycombe should be assessed in terms of their effectiveness. We recognise that Hotel Watch has a wider remit, but if found to be helpful in preventing CSE, then it should be considered for replication elsewhere within the Buckinghamshire police area. Similarly, valuable posts such as that of police school liaison officer, which is currently limited to one area within Buckinghamshire, should be considered for replication across the county.

124. We consider there to be a gap in provision for the immediate family members of victims of CSE. Support for parents is vital as parental resilience can help protect the siblings of victims from being targeted for abuse; they also deserve help in their own right. The role of adult services in this has to be fully understood and the necessary working arrangements with children's services should be developed. Siblings of victims should be considered children in need and be assessed accordingly.

125. None of the work on CSE can be considered without considering in parallel the improvement work going on across children's social care and the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board. Systemic issues within the two have a direct impact on their ability to play their critical respective roles in the multi-agency response that CSE requires.

126. As a Select Committee we have been monitoring the improvement work and will continue to do so via our regular updates on the subject. In terms of the multi-agency response to CSE, we will monitor this through updates to us on the

implementation of the recommendations of this report¹⁹ and work underway more generally.

127. Underpinning all of the work by the Safeguarding Board and the individual agencies is the need to continuously seek to raise awareness of CSE with the general public. A well informed public equipped with the knowledge firstly to spot the signs, and secondly the awareness of to whom to report concerns,²⁰ is one of the most effective ways to prevent child sexual exploitation (CSE), assuming people are willing to raise concerns.

128. Publicising what to look for, and information on what to do in the event of any concerns, will be effective only insofar as people are willing and able to inform the authorities. If people are unwilling to raise concerns – possibly because of fear or a sense that it is ‘not their problem’ – then efforts to raise awareness will not have the desired effect.

129. Therefore the current awareness raising work should be reframed in order to reassure those that might be too afraid to report concerns, and to promote a sense of shared responsibility amongst those that might consider that it is ‘not their business’ to make a report. The message that ‘safeguarding is everybody’s business’ should be reinforced to the general public.

130. A commendable amount of work is taking place, but we believe that further work is needed to understand CSE involving boys. Whilst the majority of known cases so far have involved girls, significant proportions involve boys. There needs to be a concerted effort to understand CSE involving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, where there may or may not be other complicating factors involved.

¹⁹ Expected initially at 6 and 12 month intervals

²⁰ The police on 101 or in an emergency on 999; or First Response on 08454 600001

Glossary

Cabinet Member	A councillor that makes decisions; the Cabinet Member for Children's Services makes decisions about the services provided by the Children's Social Care & Learning Business Unit.
Children's Social Care & Learning Business Unit	The part of Buckinghamshire County Council that provides services for children and young people.
Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee	The committee of councillors that scrutinises the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.
Councillors	Elected representatives of local people.
Early Help	Making sure that support is provided to families before problems become severe.
First Response	The first point of contact for people that wish to speak to the Children's Social Care & Learning Business Unit regarding a child about whom they have concerns.
Kingfisher Unit	The specialist unit in Oxford that deals with child sexual exploitation.
Managing Director for Children's Social Care & Learning	The Buckinghamshire County Council officer in charge of the Children's Social Care & Learning Business Unit.
Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)	A secure environment where people from the police, health services and social care share information about vulnerable people.
Ofsted	The organisation that inspects children's services, schools, etc.
RUSafe?	A service that Buckinghamshire County Council pays Barnardos to provide in the county. It works with children at risk of sexual exploitation.
Safeguarding Children Board	Local Safeguarding Children Boards operate in every local authority area in England. Their role is to bring together all the organisations that have a responsibility to protect children in that area.
Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Conference (SERAC)	A meeting between different organisations to discuss cases of sexual exploitation.
Serious Case Review	An investigation into what went wrong if something serious happens to a child or young person.
Swan Unit	The specialist unit in Buckinghamshire that deals with child sexual exploitation.

Appendix A: Victims' Contributions

Thanks to staff of RUSafe? for gathering the following

Questions for clients on behalf of Bucks Select Committee (Council Members)

Thinking about the reasons why you may be working with R-U-Safe?, we'd be grateful for your thoughts on the below questions, which we've been asked to gather for the Bucks Select Committee. Please be as honest as you wish.

Thank You ☺

Questions for clients on behalf of Bucks Select Committee (Council Members)

Thinking about the reasons why you may be working with R-U-Safe?, we'd be grateful for your thoughts on the below questions, which we've been asked to gather for the Bucks Select Committee. Please be as honest as you wish.

Thank You ☺

1. Who has helped you?

"R-U-Safe & Foster carer"

"[...] from RUSafe and one or two care home staff throughout the three homes I have lived in."

"RUSafe, CAMHs Care Home staff."

"[Person's name]"

"Mum and dad, foster carers that I've had."

"Mum and RUSafe."

"Police, school counsellor, family, RUSafe, YES, Pastoral Manager at school."

"[...] from R U Safe"

2. Who could you talk to?

"[...] from RUSafe, [...] from CATCH team and [...] from CAMHS"

"RUSafe, CAMHs Care Home staff." (LAC)

"[...]"

"Most people, talk to my mum the most."

"Mum, friends and RUSafe."

“Pastoral manager, RUSafe, mum, School counsellor, Police only if really serious.”

“[...] (R u Safe), Stapleton House (Care Home)” (LAC)

“R-U-Safe, foster carer and social worker (possibly).”

3. Who could you NOT talk to?

“Social care, CAMHS, Police.”

“Police, social worker.”

“A member of staff at Padstones.” (LAC)

“Staff at 1A -don’t feel they listen.”

“Dad, sister, Police and YES counsellor.”

“Social worker, Police – if small incident, Dad.”

“Family, teachers”

“Friends, police, foster carer and social worker (maybe)”

4. What is the one message you would like to give Buckinghamshire authorities regarding your experience?

“Since I have been in care, I have had 5 social workers and I have not felt listened to by any of them. They are difficult to contact and can never answer my questions. I have never seen my social workers regularly and have never been made aware of changes to social workers until it had already happened. At the moment, I have been told that I have a new social worker again, yet nobody can tell me who they are.

I am very unhappy about being in care and feel that I am kept completely in the dark about all things in direct relation to my life. Nobody discusses with me the changes that happen, which makes me feel angry and that I cannot trust anybody.

The only people that I feel genuinely care about me are the ones that cannot make decisions. Projects like RUSafe have such an impact, but so called “professionals” like social care do not think they are important and do not involve them in decisions or encourage me to keep engaging with them.

How can I feel safe and secure and try and be happy when I am so mistrusting of all the people who decide what happens in my life. I have no power, so why should I go along with the plans they make for me?”

"I have had too many changes of social workers."

"Terrible, rubbish, bad – High Number of social workers"

"Life is hard."

"That they are slow at doing things that you request. Slow at organising things – both meetings and activities. Budget is tiny- stops me from doing activities."

"Don't know."

"People are helpful, understanding and offer support – RUSafe, school counsellor, Police, Sexual health clinic."

"Thank you, this[R u Safe] has help me a lot ☺"

It [RUSafe] is really helpful and it actually helps.

5. Is there anything you would like to ask the council members who are asking you these questions?

No

"Why do my social workers keep changing? This stops me from building any kind of trusting relationship with them." (LAC)

Nope.

No.

No.

No.

"Give [...] a pay rise (he didn't ask me to say this)"

"Why do projects like 'Skidz' get closed down, when they are really good for young people?"

"Why has it taking so long to ask for the views of young people"

Appendix B: Schedule of Witnesses

10 June, 2pm – 4pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fran Gosling-Thomas, Chairman, BSCB - Alison Byrne, BSCB Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Committee Chairman - Helen Fortgang, Children’s Service Manager, Barnardos
25 June, 1pm – 5pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pauline Dichler, Headteacher. Stony Dean secondary special school - Sarah Leighton, Headteacher, Hughenden Primary School - Catherine Davies, Principal, The Chalfonts Community College - PC Graham Briggins, Thames Valley Police School Liaison Officer - Therese McAlorum, Education Safeguarding Advisor (BCC)²¹
9 th July, 1pm – 5pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trish Hunter Service Manager, Brook - Sue Myers, Lead Nurse Sexual Health, Terrence Higgins Trust Outreach Sexual Health Service - Alison Chapman, Matron, Sexual Health & Contraceptive Service, Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust - Cristabel Morris, Public Health Practitioner, Buckinghamshire County Council - Angie Blackmore, Public Health Principal, Buckinghamshire County Council
30 th July, 9pm – 5pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maurice Emberson, independent social care consultant - Tom Duffin, National Partnerships Director, Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE) - Carol Douch, Service Director, Child and Family Service, Buckinghamshire County Council - Anita Hawthorne, CSE Social Worker, Buckinghamshire County Council - Richard North, DCI - Protecting Vulnerable People Buckinghamshire, Thames Valley Police - Kate Riddle, Head of Nursing Children and Young People’s Directorate, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust - Emma Rolfe, Named Nurse for Child Protection, Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust - Parent of a CSE victim²²
14 th September, 1pm – 4pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neil Stannett, Environmental Health Manager, Wycombe District Council - Nathan March, Licensing Manager, Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council - Peter Seal, Licensing Manager, Aylesbury Vale District Council - Kyle Bennett, Senior licensing officer at Aylesbury Vale District Council
16 th September, 12pm – 4pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visit to Birmingham City Council children’s services scrutiny committee to hear about their experiences of conducting a CSE Inquiry

²¹ Written submission

²² Written submission

<p>1st October, 9am – 1pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joy Shakespeare, Head of Family Resilience, Buckinghamshire County Council - Lesley Manka, Service Manager, Addaction - Sue Butt, Operations Manager - Children & Young People’s Joint Commissioning Team, Buckinghamshire County Council - Andrew Bluck, Contract Manager, Amey Client Transport, Buckinghamshire County Council - Pauline Camilleri, Head of Youth Offending Service, Buckinghamshire County Council - Acting Sergeant Phil Ince, Neighbourhood Policing Team, Wycombe Local Police Area - CSE victims²³
--	--

²³ Written submission

